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INTERNATIONAL NGOs AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

May 18, 1999
Ottawa

INTERNATIONAL NGOs AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

On May 17th, 1999, The Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development organised a small roundtable with six NGOs, including the Red Cross and CARE Canada, for George Haynal, the Assistant Deputy Minister, Americas. The purpose of the meeting was to think about work twenty years from now and implications for foreign policy. This conversation was among others conducted by Mr. Haynal with the Department officials, journalists, bankers, academics as well as social scientists and social workers. Some of the issues addressed in those conversations included the nature of career, family, and life styles. The aim of this meeting was to look at the problem through NGO perspectives and experiences.

Context

George Haynal started the conversation by pointing to the rapidly changing work environment and asking how large institutions such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade might approach and respond to these changes. What does globalisation and the information revolution mean for the institutional structure of DFAIT? What do changes mean for the policy community? What is the work environment going to be like in ten years and how will the conduct of Canada's foreign affairs evolve? How will the roles of various actors change and what impact will that have on relationships (i.e., the relationship between NGOs and DFAIT)?

Conceptualising Work in the Future

Information technology now has an impact on how work is done:

1. **Time has compressed** since the new communication technologies not only allow for a constant stream of new information but also cut down the reaction time an individual has to respond to messages. The "calming influence of a time lag" has disappeared as people fire off e-mails to each other in an instant, often based on "gut reactions" rather than deliberation. However, attempts to improve the quality of information run into problems related to censorship and the futility of trying to control digitally generated information.
2. Another emerging trend in the contemporary workplace has been an **information overload.** Relatively easy use of communication technology combined with a declining price has led to a constant movement of huge amounts of information. No methods have yet been found to cope with this situation.
3. New communications technologies contribute to the emergence of **new institutional arrangements** such as virtual organisations and digital resource bases. Mariane Whiteman of CARE Canada shared her experiences with new technology in facing the Kosovo crisis. She described how, through the use of wind-up radios and computer networks, a virtual organisation came to exist from a myriad of atomised agencies and individuals. Harry Qualman,

the Executive Director of the United Nations Associations of Canada, pointed out how video conferencing is changing the way international work is done and the impact such technology might have on diplomacy in the near future. Geographical location of an actor is quickly becoming less and less relevant. He also drew attention to how digital information is fast replacing the need for resource centres and libraries. Now all you need is a computer connected to the Internet.

4. The emergence of new and relatively accessible communication technologies has led to a **changing relationship between information and power**. Power previously derived from an information monopoly or exclusive access. This is eroding rapidly due to new technologies that make information readily available. This shift has tremendous implications for the structure of power relationships, one of which is the employer's authority over employees.
5. Camille Dion of Canadian Red Cross Society addresses the rapidly growing **generational gap.** Generations now differ in levels of computer literacy and also attitudes towards work. She elaborated on the implications the upcoming flexible and independent "techno-workforce" might have on the traditional, usually hierarchical, structures of large institutions. Will this new work-force submit to rigid hierarchies and outdated procedures? Where do the new boundaries lie and what will be the basis of authority in the 21st century? Within this context the issues of institutional loyalty and long term careers were addressed. George Haynal raised the point that perhaps more and more people hold loyalty to their professions rather than institutions. Values seem to rank high for potential employees while cynicism about government structures abound – to the general benefit of NGOs in terms of recruitment.

Implications for Recruitment

The NGO representatives stressed the importance of computer literacy and experience abroad in hiring new staff. They pointed to a growing tendency for volunteer and short-term work as well as value in hiring flexible, independent consultants. Life styles are changing. The work force is becoming more flexible, people are less likely to remain in one position for decades.

Harry Qualman of UNAC and Pari Johnston of AUCC stressed the importance of internships in training recent university graduates and better preparing them for work in the NGO community.

Structural/Institutional Impact: DFAIT and NGOs, DFAIT and CIDA

The trends addressed in the discussion led to some thought about the changing relationship between government and the "information society." George Haynal stressed the growing role of NGOs in the foreign affairs and international relations environment. There is a need to make the international work of NGOs, DFAIT, and CIDA more coherent. **It is important for NGOs to maintain their non-government status. However, the changing landscape of international affairs, the human security agenda of Minister Axworthy, and the growing involvement of civil society in public**

policy development, public education, aid programs and other activities contribute to sometimes overlapping efforts on the part of NGOs, DFAIT, and CIDA. Relationships among these three actors must be redefined and restructured, keeping in mind the rapidly changing work environment and the fact that recruitment pools are already shared.

International NGO's and the Future of Work

May 18, 1999
L.B. Pearson Building
Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 125 Sussex Drive, Ottawa
1:00 to 4:00 pm
List of Invitees

Mr Harry Qualman
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125 promenade Sussex Drive Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

Ottawa, May 18, 1999

Dear friends,

I am pleased to forward to you some information on the upcoming roundtable "The workforce of the future" to be held at the Lester B. Pearson Building, May 18 , 1999, 1:00 PM, at the special request of the Assistant Deputy Minister, Mr. George Haynal.

The objective of the roundtable is to explore with the NGO community views about the changing nature of work and the workforce, both inside and outside government. Themes to start the discussion could include: the global environment; the role of technology; international relations and social changes in Canada.

We are inviting leading NGOs who are likely to be facing challenges in organization, program delivery, and work force issues. If you are unable to attend, please invite someone from your office to join us.

For further information please contact: Dominic Gosselin tel. 992-3690.

Sincerely,

Steve Lee.

Steve Lee
National Director

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125 Sussex Dr. Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

Roundtable
"The workforce of the future"

Tuesday, May 18, 1999
1:00 PM
Lester B. Pearson Building
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario

Upon arrival at the Pearson Building, please give your name to the commissioner at the reception desk so that we may escort you to the conference room.

1:00 PM	Welcome and Introduction
	Mr. George Haynal Assistant Deputy Minister for the Americas Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
1:15	Roundtable Discussion Part I
2:30	Coffee Break
2:45	Roundtable Discussion Part II
3:45	Concluding Remarks
4:00 PM	Departure

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